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9TH CONGRESS

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Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n 03690 San Vicente del Raspeig. Alicante (SPAIN)

[eurau@ua.es](mailto:eurau@ua.es)

## Architecture reloaded

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People as activators of social and urban regeneration. Rethinking a “modern building” in Naples

**Scala, Paola<sup>1</sup>; Grazia Pota<sup>2</sup>**

1. University of Naples “Federico II, DiARC\_ Department of Architecture, Naples, Italy

2. University of Naples “Federico II, DiARC\_ Department of Architecture, Naples, Italy

### Synopsis

This paper is part of a research aiming to verifying if and how through the architecture project it is possible to consider some marginal social categories of our society as protagonists of innovation, using their specific cultural components as activators of the urban regeneration of some “residual” places where the concentration of these categories is more widespread.

With the expression “architecture project” we intend a process that, starting from the construction of a demand, builds scenarios, tools and strategies of a “resilient” intervention, capable of “adapting” to the changes of our time. Our field of action are the suburbs, where people belonging to disadvantaged social classes have often been confined in a sort of macro-ghetto. These people are not considered as elements to be “recovered” from a cultural, social and urban point of view, but as activators of an “innovative” regeneration of the places in which they have been confined.

**Key words:** Dwelling, regeneration, adaptivity, resiliency, parameters.

## 1. Assumptions and objectives

Many suburbs of our cities are often the result of a progressive loss of value and of urban, social and economic decline which determines the conditions for the taking up residence of other disadvantaged social categories, such as migrants, sometimes ending up generating social conflicts between old and new residents. It often happens that the original inhabitants try to leave the place as soon as their social, economic and cultural conditions make it possible. In this way it may happen that the relationship between old and new residents is reversed. Hence, these places are increasingly transformed into ghettos in which the “newcomers” try to rebuild their housing models in an “informal” and provisional way which seems to take away space, in terms of quality and quantity, to the natives.

Starting from these assumptions research tries to reflect on the way in which an architecture project can measure itself against the social and cultural complexity of these places, designing spaces capable of responding simultaneously to the desires and requests of different cultures. Not simply flexible architecture but “adaptive” one, which is able to keep in play all the “parameters” which define its effectiveness, and to change according to their variation. An important part of this research will be about the development of the organizational criteria of these types of space and of the indicators able to measure them, which can flow into the project as “parameters” and can be managed through the parametric design approach.

The research is still in its early stages and it was decided to start from the dwelling dimension. We are talking about a double “retroactive research”: on one hand it tries to draw different ways of approaching the issue of social integration, on the other hand it has a retroactive look at all the research that, starting from the modern movement, focused on the collective housing dimension, trying to account for all the “sliding doors” that could have open to another possible post-modernity if this field had accepted the solicitations of some “secondary” instead of the “dominant” instances. The state of the art starts again from the strength of the “modern architectural thinking” but at the same time it also collects those “eccentric incentives” that, from a given moment onwards, have tried to stem the “mechanistic” drift. On the one hand we intend to start from a certain disciplinary tradition, from Gropius to Klein, to Le Corbusier and CIAM, which set themselves the goal of playing an active role at the “service” of society. On the other hand we intend to recover “others” research, like those of Team X, especially those of Giancarlo De Carlo or Yona Friedman which were particularly relevant for bringing the individual back in the spotlight instead of the average man, replacing the concept of function with that of “use”.

## 2. A new parametric approach

The first experimentation that was carried out consists of an application aimed at transforming a residential concrete building which was built after the earthquake of 1980 in Naples, codified by regional technical standards. The transformation is based on the logic of a perfectible project, modifiable in time and space according to the needs of users and taking up the Elemental logic of Aravena and the Lima plan of '70s.



Instead of thinking about the new type of housing to be inserted according to the characteristics of the new residents, it was decided to start from the different rooms of the house and work on the relationship that these environments require to establish with each other. In this way, goals have been established, linked to issues of accessibility, lighting and mutual relations between the spaces. These goals have been elaborated in an algorithm, in order to satisfy them, to bring to a field of possible solutions (Fig.1) starting from which the plants of the building have developed with a more traditional approach.



Figure 1.

In this way, architecture reasons through topology, instead of typology. Hence, it considers not only the spaces but, above all, their inter-relationships which become representation of different ways of living. Recalling the words of Alison and Peter Smithson: «when an idea is clear in the mind in the form of a significant graph (with recognized patterns of association, identity, use, and movement) it is possible to extend it to the idea that the ordering of a building can be sufficiently understandable to point to possible creative uses and its willingness to change.»<sup>1</sup>

Parametric software «allows organizing projects into associative systems based on the logic of relationship between parts, offering the possibility of altering the overall configuration of a system, acting on the parameters placed

<sup>1</sup> SMITHSON, Alison Margaret and Peter SMITHSON, 2001. The Charged Void: Architecture. p. 84

at the base of the design process, according to a logic of propagation of the modifications.»<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, through the repetition of the same process, they are able to provide a range of solutions, rather than a single solution, expanding the panorama of possibilities.

### 3. (open) Conclusion

The proposed research, therefore, aims at rethinking the generative approach “shifting” the advantages in “conceptual” and on the user side, releasing it from formal or structural outcomes and trying to re-read the modern architecture dwelling tradition in a more contemporary logic, in which the programmatic indeterminacy (the contemporary *utilitas*) seems not only to better translate the needs of a multicultural society in continuous transformation but also to open new possibilities to the ever more compelling question of integration.

...to be continued.

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<sup>2</sup> TEDESCHI, Arturo, Il processo è più importante del risultato. [online]

## Biography

**Paola Scala.** Architect, PhD, Associate Professor in Architectural and Urban Project, University of Naples "Federico II". Member of the college of the PhD School in Architecture - DoARC, Federico II. She has been lecturer in Naples and at the Polytechnic of Turin. Member of the scientific committee of Eurau since 2010, she deals with architectural and urban design with particular attention to the modification of instruments, models and compositional techniques in contemporary times. More recently, she has directed her research towards the Horizon 2020 Social Sciences and Humanities themes, and more specifically in the section "Europe in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", focusing on an housing less abstract and more close to the needs of people, with particular reference to the suburbs of large cities.

**Grazia Pota.** PhD student in Architecture at the University of Naples "Federico II". She graduated in Science of Architecture (Bachelor's degree) in November 2014 with a thesis entitled "The shape of light in the Étienne Louis Boullée's conical Cenotaph". Three years later, in July 2017, she graduated in Architecture (Master's degree) at the University of Naples "Federico II" with a thesis concerning the design of dwelling and its possible evolution with a computational approach through parametric tools. From January 2018, she's working on these issues with a research program entitled "Parametric Design and Social Housing: processes to recover Modernity".